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## Sermon on the Epistle Lesson for Pentecost.

ACTS 2, 1—13.

(On the occasion of the confirmation of two adults.)

It is a wonderful occurrence that is recorded in this text. Twelve men, comparatively illiterate and entirely unaccustomed to public speaking, are suddenly filled with a miraculous ardor and begin to address a great assemblage in fiery words and with great fluency of speech. And what is most wonderful about it: they address them not in their own native language only, but the nations of various countries all hear them speak in their different tongues, so that the multitude is stirred up about it and begins to ask in astonishment: "Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we are born?"

Surely, this was wonderful. How are we to explain it? The text tells us: "And suddenly there came . . . as the Spirit gave them utterance." This solves the mystery: The Spirit of God had descended upon them; He had filled them with the fire of His holy zeal; He had imparted to them the faculty of speaking with strange tongues. This whole occurrence, then, was a miracle of God's almighty power.

Now whenever God does anything, He has a purpose in view, all His actions are governed by an eternal counsel, and so also this miraculous outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the twelve apostles and the wonderful effect it had upon them had a definite aim and purpose. Nor do we need to look very far to find out what this mission was which the Holy Ghost was to fulfill here upon earth. We read at the end of the chapter that by the preaching of the apostles that very day three thousand souls were added to the number of the believers. This, then, was the aim and purpose of the miraculous outpouring of God's Spirit: the bringing of souls into the kingdom

of Christ, the founding and upbuilding of the Church of Christ. Now as we are to receive two new members into our congregation to-day, let me choose this work of the Spirit of God for my topic now. I shall endeavor to show to you

### THAT THE UPBUILDING OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

1. *The fact that this is indeed His work;*
2. *The manner in which He performs this work.*

#### 1.

The day of Pentecost, on which these wonderful occurrences took place, was the beginning of the Church of Christ, the beginning of the New Testament Church of God. Until then the operation of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, of Christ Himself, and also of the disciples of Christ, had been within the bounds of the Jewish Church and limited to the Jewish nation. Christ Himself had said: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." By this He did not mean that He had come to redeem the Jews only, but He did mean that during His lifetime His preaching and His official activity was to be confined to that nation. Accordingly, He also gave to the twelve apostles, when He sent them out on their first preaching-mission, this instruction: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And so it was to remain until the day of Pentecost. At His ascension Christ gave His disciples the command to remain at Jerusalem until they should have received the promise of the Father, *i. e.*, until the Holy Ghost should have descended upon them. For "out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem," Is. 2, 3.

But on that day of Pentecost a change should take place. Then, as Christ had also told His disciples at His ascension, they should receive power, after the Holy Ghost had come upon them, and they should be His witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Then, in other words, the New Testament Church should be founded, which should embrace not only Jews, but Jews and Gentiles both, which should gather its members from all the various nations of the globe.

And this we see fulfilled in the text. There we are told of the wonderful outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the twelve apostles in cloven tongues of fire, symbolizing the fiery eloquence and ardent zeal with which their tongues should henceforth proclaim the wonderful works of God to the people of the earth. And then and there they received, through the miraculous operation of this Spirit of God, the power of speaking in strange languages, which enabled them



to go forth into the remotest parts of the earth, and to preach to all nations, without previous preparation, the Gospel of salvation by faith in Christ, and thus to spread the New Testament Church of Christ in all the world.

And what a glorious beginning of the New Testament Church was here immediately made! When this thing happened, there were assembled at Jerusalem many people from various countries, who had come for the purpose of celebrating the festival of Pentecost in accordance with the Old Testament command of God. And when these people were brought together by the strange noise and then heard the apostles speaking in their various tongues of the wonderful works of God, a great commotion was raised. And not only were they astonished to hear these unlearned, heavy-tongued Galileans speak in many different languages, but they "were pricked in their hearts" (v. 37), the Word of God took effect, and immediately on that very day "about three thousand souls were added unto them" (v. 41). Here, then, we have the beginning of the New Testament Church, which gathers into its fold members from all the nations of the globe.

This founding of the New Testament Church, this conversion of these three thousand souls, was the work of the Holy Ghost, for it was He who had descended upon the disciples in the shape of "cloven tongues of fire," and "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." That was the object of His mission here upon earth, to convert sinners and bring them to Christ. But He is not satisfied with having founded the Church, He continues the work which He then began, He also builds the Church by the preaching of the Gospel, and every sinner converted to Christ and added to the Church since that day has been brought into its fold by the working of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Ghost "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

True, we do not see such miraculous manifestations of this outpouring of the Spirit any more as we read of in our text. It does not occur any more that unlearned and timid men are suddenly filled with a lion's courage and receive the gift of addressing large audiences with ease and fluency. Nor does the Holy Ghost any longer communicate to men the faculty of speaking in strange languages which they never learned. These external, palpable manifestations of the Holy Spirit's indwelling have ceased long ago, and men wait for them in vain. They were necessary at the time of the founding of the Christian Church, but they are necessary no longer. Remember, the apostles were the first to proclaim the new faith. They must battle against and overcome the inveterate hatred of the Jews and the prejudice of the Gentiles against the religion which

they proclaimed; they were to go forth in order to spread a Gospel of a crucified Savior which nobody knew and everybody was inclined to sneer at. That was no easy task. That required, indeed, an undaunted heroism and an unflinching faith. Moreover, the apostles were to go forth into all the countries of the world and among all the nations of the globe to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and for this purpose it was necessary that they should possess the power of speaking in strange languages, so that they might be able to preach to every nation with which they came in contact. But this is no longer necessary now. For now that the Church has been established and organized ministers are no longer sent out to travel through all the countries of the earth, as the apostles were, but every pastor has his particular congregation over which he has been made overseer. So he either knows the language in which he has to preach, or if he does not, he has time and opportunity to learn it. Accordingly, these external, miraculous manifestations of the Spirit are no longer necessary and for this reason not to be expected. But notwithstanding all this it is still the Holy Ghost that works through the preaching of the Gospel; He is still at work building up the Church of Christ and daily adding new members to the people of God.

## 2.

Having thus endeavored to demonstrate to you the fact that the upbuilding of the Church of Christ is the work of the Holy Ghost, let me now also, in the second place, show you in what manner He performs this work.

It is an easy matter to gather this from our text and the rest of the chapter from which the text is taken. For how were these three thousand converted and brought to Christ? What was the means through which the Holy Ghost operated upon their hearts? It is evident that the medium through which He wrought were the apostles. It was around these that the multitude were gathered, attracted by the "sound as of a rushing mighty wind," and astonished by the appearance of the cloven tongues of fire upon their heads and their miraculous speaking in divers languages. And in like manner it is easy to see in what way the Holy Ghost used these instruments that He had chosen: He moved them to preach to the multitude, to speak to them of the great works of God. And it was at the end of the mighty sermon of Peter, as we read in the latter part of the chapter, that these three thousand souls were added to the number of the believers. It was the preaching of the Gospel, then, it was the proclamation of the glorious works of God for the redemption of mankind, it was the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that wrought this great change in the souls of these men. It was by the power of the Word that the Spirit of God exerted His almighty influence upon their



hearts. And let us not overlook it: those who gladly received the Word were baptized. Also Baptism and the other sacrament of the New Testament, the Lord's Supper, are means through which the Holy Spirit operates and builds up the Church.

I say: by which He operates now and builds up the Church. For He works in exactly the same manner now as He did then. He employs the same means for the building up of the Church, as well as for its preservation, that He used in its founding. The Gospel of Christ is to-day, just as it was then, the power of God unto salvation; and Holy Baptism is now, as it was in the time of Paul, the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. These are the means which the Spirit of God employs, and without those means we must not expect Him to operate upon our hearts or those of others. Without using these means we cannot hope to add new members to the body of Christ, cannot expect to win souls for His kingdom here on earth.

Baptism, then, is a means through which the Holy Ghost works, through which He regenerates and renews men. We "must be born again of water and of the Spirit," says Christ Himself. This sacrament of Baptism is the principal means, therefore, of adding new members to the Church. It is designed especially to bring our little children to Christ. O ye parents, do not neglect to bring your little ones to Christ in that way! He Himself says: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Remember, through the water of Holy Baptism, because it is connected with the Word of God, the Holy Ghost cleanses the soul of your children, works faith in their heart, and makes them partakers of Christ's redemption, makes them members of the Church.

But do not imagine that you have done all of your duty towards your children, if you have brought them to Baptism. Nay, remember also the injunction of St. Paul: "Ye parents, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord!" The flame of faith which was kindled in their heart in Baptism must be nourished and kept alive as they grow up. The Gospel must be applied to them as they become capable of understanding and grasping it. Therefore give your children a Christian training. See to it that they receive instruction in the teachings of your faith. And begin early! Don't wait until they are grown, or nearly so. No, teach them as soon as they can begin to understand. O ye mothers, into whose hands God primarily has laid the training of the little ones, teach them little prayers, tell them of the Savior, lead them forward to a knowledge of salvation. In infancy the heart is plastic, and it is during these early years that your children are most susceptible to the work of God's Spirit. And when they become a little older and are far

enough advanced mentally, send them to a Christian school, both day-school and Sunday school, so that the work for which you have already laid the foundation may be continued. And, of course, when they have reached the age of discretion, send them to the catechetical instruction preparatory to confirmation, and use your influence, both during the years of school attendance and catechetical instruction, toward reenforcing the instruction which they there receive. Ah, my hearers, our religious schools are workshops of the Holy Spirit in which He educates members for the Church of Christ; they are an important factor in the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom here on earth.

But in addition to the instruction that our children and young people receive in the saving truths of the Gospel, God's Spirit also builds and preserves the Church by the public preaching of the Word. That, too, is an important means through which He operates. Hence Christians should everywhere provide for the proclamation of the Gospel. Wherever there is a Christian congregation, their first care must be to call a pastor who may preach to them and to others in their vicinity, for the strengthening and preservation of their own faith and for the conversion and Christianizing of the churchless in their neighborhood. Here, however, it is to be observed that the regular preaching of the Gospel by the called minister of the congregation is to be looked upon as the means of gaining sinners for Christ. The revivals, which are employed so much by churches in our time and day to convert men, are certainly not the right means for this purpose. These revivalists, as a rule, make it their aim to work upon the feelings of their hearers, and these feelings many mistake for a manifestation of conversion and the influence of the Holy Ghost. But after their excitement has subsided, these emotions leave them again, and in many, perhaps in most, cases they relapse into the old state of apathy, fall away from the church, and perhaps become worse than they had been before. Now I do not mean to say that no good ever comes of these revivals, that nobody is ever converted and becomes a permanent and faithful member of the church through them. But I do mean to say, most emphatically, that they do a great deal of harm, and that the harm outweighs by far the good that they accomplish. In churches where the revival method prevails, people are led to believe that only a revival is a proper time to be converted; they are thus made to think lightly of the regular preaching of their pastor; they become prone to neglect the means of grace, and are in danger of growing indifferent towards religion, consoling themselves with the thought: "Well, when the next revival comes around, I will try to 'get religion' and do better."—Surely, my friends, there is nothing like the good old Lutheran method of thorough instruction prior to admission into the church.



When we take members into our Church, whether they be our own children, or whether they be adults, they do not join in the heat of excitement; they know exactly what they are doing; they have considered well the step they are taking, and are thoroughly impressed with its seriousness and importance, and so they are certainly less likely to backslide and to leave the church than are those who join it under the high-pressure methods of a revival.

But perhaps some one will interpose here: Why, but does not the narrative of our text resemble very much the proceedings at one of our modern revivals? Was not the multitude which was assembled there in a state of great excitement? And was not a large number, a number altogether unparalleled by that of any other occasion on record, added to the Church that very day while the excitement lasted? Is this not a worthy precedent, then, which we can well afford to imitate? It may, indeed, appear so at the first glance; but it will not bear the test if we investigate a little more closely. In the first place, the circumstances which led to the conversion of that multitude bear no resemblance whatever to those under which the Gospel is preached nowadays. Let us bear in mind: this was the first time that the Gospel of Christ was preached in just that manner. The avowed followers of the despised Jesus had been but few until that day. But there were, no doubt, among that multitude a great number of sincere souls, who were waiting for the salvation of Israel, persons who, from their previous knowledge of the Nazarene's person and work, of His death, resurrection, and ascension, were already favorably inclined towards the religion of Jesus, with whom only a spark was needed to kindle the fire of faith. And now came these wonderful occurrences. Men, whom before they had known to be uneducated men, timid and retiring, suddenly got up before a vast audience and preached in many different tongues and with soul-stirring words of the great works of God. Is it any wonder that so large a number were overwhelmed and immediately confessed their faith in Christ? Their confession was not the outburst of excitement, it was rather the result of a long-felt conviction. — And let us stop a minute also to look at the sermon of Peter. Was that a discourse intended and adapted to raise excitement and emotion? No, it is a brief, clear, dispassionate, albeit pathetic and convincing argument, proving from the Old Testament that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, and it has nothing in common with the sentimental, sensational harangues of most modern revivalists. It is very apparent, then: this narrative here in the text cannot at all be compared to the revivals of our day, but it differs totally and essentially from these in every respect.

But I must now come to a close. I thank and praise the Lord that He has led these adults, whom we are to receive into our con-

gregation to-day by the solemn rite of confirmation, to a knowledge of the Savior, and that His Spirit has wrought the saving faith in their hearts. I thank Him that He has privileged me to be the humble means of instructing them in the doctrines of our dear Lutheran Church, and that He has made them willing and resolved to become members of this church. And it is my earnest supplication, — and do you all unite your prayers with mine, — that His Holy Spirit may preserve them in true faith until their end, and that He may continue to bless the preaching of His Holy Word in this place, so that many more souls may be added to His people, and that His holy name may be glorified now and forevermore. Amen and Amen.

G. L.

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## Dedicatory Sermon.

1 COR. 2, 2.

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The occasion that has brought us together to-day is one at which we have every reason to rejoice. The dedication of a Lutheran church, unimportant as it may seem, is always an event of peculiar significance. It means, in every case, the reassertion of those teachings and principles to which the church, nay, the civilized world, to-day, is chiefly indebted for the blessings and privileges it enjoys. Just to mention a few of these. A church freed from the thralldom of popish tyranny, a state unhampered by ecclesiastical interference, a Bible unencumbered by human traditions, a Gospel purified of the dross of human fictions, conscience liberated from the burden of self-imposed works, judgment untrammelled by human authority — these are some of the blessings that the world owes to Luther and the Reformation. And it is for these things that every true Lutheran church stands. It is for these things that she contends. Hence the dedication of a Lutheran church is an event well worthy to fill our hearts with joy and our mouths with praise and thanksgiving.

It is impossible, for lack of time, to enter into an extended discussion of the various distinctive characteristics of our church. We shall therefore confine ourselves to what is vital and fundamental in her doctrinal position. What constitutes the sum and substance of Lutheran teaching? What will be the dominating note of all the preaching in this new church edifice? This question is briefly and pointedly answered by the words of the great apostle to the Gentiles, which we have chosen for our text: "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." This was Paul's message to the Gentiles, and this is the message of the Lutheran church. Let us inquire a little more fully into these deeply significant words. The theme of our discourse, then, is:



## JESUS CHRIST AND HE CRUCIFIED THE MESSAGE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH.

We shall consider

1. *The contents of this message;*
2. *The authority of this message.*

### 1.

The people to whom the words of our text were primarily addressed were the Corinthians. The Corinthians were Greeks. The Greeks, among all nations of the ancient world, were the most celebrated for wisdom and culture. Their wise men, their philosophers, speculated on almost every subject that presents itself to thoughtful minds. By sheer force of reason and intellect they tried to solve the many mysteries with which we are surrounded. They framed one theory after another to account for the origin of the universe. They tried to explain the nature of God, and to fathom the depths of divinity. They tried to penetrate the veil that overhangs the future, and pondered deeply on immortality. They tried to analyze the nature of evil and to define the highest good. In short, they discussed, debated, disputed, lectured, and wrote books on every imaginable subject, always bent on hearing or saying something new—the most gifted and intellectual people that the world has seen.

Among this people came the Apostle Paul, a man trained, it would seem, in all the wisdom of the Greeks. What a splendid opportunity to win fame and glory! Will this brilliant genius, this keen logician, this profound thinker not avail himself of his vast resources, display his wisdom, advance some new theory, and straightway leap into eminence among the wisest of the Greeks? Oh no! With all his gifts and accomplishments, he declares to the Corinthians: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Paul has no sympathy whatever with the wranglings and janglings of the Greek philosophers. In fact, he regards the boasted wisdom of Greece with supreme contempt. "Where is the wise?" says he; "where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Commissioned by the glorified Savior to be the herald of salvation to the Gentiles, the great apostle kept all his worldly wisdom—and he possessed a goodly share—in abeyance, and was determined to preach nothing else than Jesus Christ and Him crucified, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Let us insert an application here that is much needed in our day. I should like to impress it upon all those who shall worship in this church that they should expect nothing else to be preached from this pulpit than the message brought by Paul to the Corinthians. You are not to come into this church with the expectation of listening to the discussion of the passing questions of the hour, of hearing

entertaining lectures on any and every subject, of enjoying a feast of reason or a flow of soul for a pleasant half hour. These things are all right at the proper time and at the proper place, but they are singularly out of place in a Lutheran church on a Sunday morning or evening. Jesus Christ and He crucified is the message of the Lutheran church, as it was that of St. Paul.

But what does this mean? What are the contents of this message? A very important question. There is not a church within Christendom, not a single insignificant fanatical sect, that does not claim to be preaching Jesus Christ. And yet, with malice toward none and charity for all, I maintain that many of these churches either consciously reject this message, or they fail to apprehend its true import and significance. What is commonly understood by preaching Jesus Christ? Why, to hold Him up to men as a model for imitation, to represent Him as the flower and blossom of humanity, as the perfect man, as the ideal man, as the embodiment of all virtue and excellence. According to this view, Jesus Christ is the greatest moralist, the greatest ethical teacher, the greatest lawgiver that ever visited this sphere. The essence of His religion, it is thought, is contained in the Sermon on the Mount, or more succinctly, in the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This they think is preaching Jesus Christ. And what about Christ's crucifixion? What interpretation is put on that? Plainly, if the only business of Christ was to lay down a lofty code of morals and to set us a perfect example of virtuous and holy living, the death of Christ can be of no peculiar importance to mankind. And, indeed, it is not, if those who hold the above-mentioned view of Christ's mission are right. For what have they to say about the death of our Lord? Why, poor man! say they, He suffered what many a noble man has suffered before and after Him. He was a martyr to His cause. Like many a benefactor of the race, He was totally misunderstood by His contemporaries, maltreated, rewarded by the basest ingratitude, and killed. Others, indeed, see in the death of Christ something more than a tragic martyrdom. They see in the crucifixion of Christ a mighty uplifting power, a potent inspiration to men, inasmuch as it exhibits the highest possible degree of love to God and loyalty to truth. Rather than abate one jot or one tittle from what He conceived to be the truth, Jesus submitted to all manner of indignities and wrongs, not recoiling even from an ignominious death with the vilest of criminals. The contemplation of this lofty example, it is said, is calculated to arouse in men that intense moral earnestness, that fervent devotion to God, that unwavering adherence to truth which is even stronger than death.

Now there is doubtless some truth in these statements. No one will deny that Jesus set us a perfect example of virtue which we should strive to emulate. Indeed, He Himself tells us that we should



follow in His footsteps. Nor will any one deny that His crucifixion on Calvary is a mighty incentive to self-sacrificing devotion to God, more powerful and impressive than a hundred sermons.

But, we ask, is this all that the apostle meant when he wrote the words: "I am determined," etc.? Is it even the principal thing in this message? Does it touch the root of the matter? Most assuredly not. To preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified is something entirely different. It is one of the strangest things in the world that men will persist in making their own theories about the facts of Christ's life and death, instead of adopting what the Bible itself has to say on these things. Why, for instance, resort to the martyr theory and place the death of Christ in line with that of Polycarp in the early church, or of Savonarola or John Huss in the Middle Age, while the Bible itself gives the fullest, plainest, simplest, and only satisfactory interpretation of the facts? The Bible nowhere says that the crucifixion of Christ was a martyrdom. This is an idle invention of men, flatly contradicting the Savior's explicit statement with reference to His death. Jesus distinctly says: "No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Are these the words of a martyr, who falls into the hands of his enemies and is powerless to escape their murderous fury? So when you think of what happened on that Friday morning 1900 years ago, just dismiss all ideas of martyrdom from your minds. Nor has Paul in mind the moral power view, as it has been called, of Christ's crucifixion. That the death of Christ should beget in men the virtues of self-sacrifice, holy zeal for God and truth, unswerving adherence to the right, and the like, is quite secondary and subordinate. What Paul meant to emphasize when he wrote the words of our text, was that Jesus Christ and He crucified is the ransom offered to God in atonement for your sin and transgression. He means that God laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all; in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He means that Jesus, the Innocent and Spotless One, took the place of the guilty and impure, in order that we might be clean in the sight of God. He means that Jesus, the Author and Giver of life, the Son of God, God Himself, voluntarily threw Himself into the hands of death, in order that we, the children of wrath and damnation, might be made the children of God and heirs of eternal life. In a word, the crucifixion of Christ is vicarious, substitutionary in character, Jesus assuming the punishment due to the sin and guilt of fallen humanity. That is what Paul means. That is the message, the Gospel, which he proclaimed in season and out of season. And this is the cardinal theme, the guiding principle, of all the preaching and teaching of the Lutheran church.

Not a very attractive message, to be sure; not such as to meet with a hearty response and a ready acceptance by men. Paul, in his

day, did not win multitudes by preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The philosophers at Athens turned away from him with a sneer and called him a babbler. And the Corinthian church was composed of men in the humbler walks of life. Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called. And so it has been at all times, and especially in our own. We may, therefore, well ask the question, whether this message of Christ crucified is final and authoritative.

## 2.

Paul thought it was. After his departure from Corinth, divisions and contentions arose among the little flock which he had gathered. The church was split into various factions and parties. The cause of these divisions was that these unfledged Christians failed to recognize fully the supreme authority of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. Some were attracted by the eloquent style of Apollos, the successor of Paul at Corinth, and made his name their party-cry. "We are of Apollos," said they. Others were more in sympathy with the Apostle Peter. "We are of Peter," was their cry. Still others clung to Paul himself; Paul was their man.

When the apostle heard of these things, he indignantly reproved the Corinthians for their folly. "Is Christ divided?" said he. "Was Paul crucified for you? What is Apollos and what is Paul? Ministers, through whom ye have believed." Will you try to lay another foundation for your faith? "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." These are plain words. Manifestly, Jesus Christ and He crucified is to Paul the Apostle the one sole foundation of Christianity. It is as if he said: "Beware, lest any of you rashly lay his hand to this precious corner-stone to disfigure or displace it!" Here, at all events, there can be no change and no revision of the creed.

Many people nowadays do not think just exactly as Paul thought. They boldly challenge the authority of the old Gospel message. Not long ago I read, in one of the most widely circulated weeklies of the land, the statement of a representative man, who coolly sums up his position regarding the Gospel of Christ in the words: "We are weary of Christ crucified." Men want something else, something more modern, something more attractive, something more in keeping with the high plane of culture which they think we have reached. Our times are times of doubt, of skepticism, of criticism. Men insist on trying and testing everything as to its soundness and validity. If this is done with sober judgment and common sense, we have no objection to it. Now of all things that are being subjected to the searching fires of criticism, the Bible, the foundation of our faith, is the thing that is most mercilessly assailed. I cannot enlarge here on this subject. Suffice it to say that in certain quarters of Christen-



dom the cherished beliefs of centuries, truths regarded as forever established, are simply swept away by the stroke of a pen or a dictatorial statement. A few years ago, a prominent teacher in one of the leading educational centers of our country wrote a book entitled, "The Finality of the Christian Religion." The title is suggestive. The question discussed is whether the Christian religion is the final, the only authoritative religion; or will it, as we ascend in the scale of progress, be superseded by something else, something better? The results arrived at by this scholar are such that, were we to adopt them, we would have nothing but wood, hay, and stubble instead of green pastures. Some months ago another man occupying a similar position in a similar seat of learning wrote a book entitled, "The Prophet of Nazareth." He discusses the question whether Jesus is the Savior of the world. His conclusions are that Jesus of Nazareth is not, and never claimed to be, the Messiah, the Savior of mankind. He tries to hurl our Lord from His royal throne and drag Him down to the low level of ordinary humanity. I mention these things just to show you the trend and tendency of modern religious or irreligious thought. But you may say, "What does it amount to after all, if a few learned men in the seclusion of their study rooms write books hostile to Christian faith? This has no influence upon the lump of Christian society in general." Oh! but it has. These books are sold, and eagerly read by hundreds of preachers, who will present their contents as the latest startling theory to their congregations some fine Sunday morning. Thus this virus filters down from the skeptical professor's chair through the preacher's pulpit into the rank and file of the common churchgoer. Why, to rest calmly in the faith of our fathers, to hold fast to the faith once delivered to the saints, is considered a sign of intellectual torpor and stagnation in our day.

Now in opposition to this spirit of religious anarchy prevailing within the bounds of Christianity itself, the Lutheran church has at all times been characterized by her loyalty and fidelity to the Word. The words of Christ and His appointed messengers, the prophets and apostles, are final and authoritative to her. And this is not only scriptural, it is reasonable as well. Whoever spoke as Christ did? Even His greatest enemies were overawed by the majesty and originality of His teaching. "No man ever spoke like this man," said they. "To whom shall we go?" said Peter. "Thou hast words of eternal life." And Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, not only fixed the seal of His authority upon the entire Old Testament Scriptures, but also commissioned His apostles to be His ambassadors in New Testament times. What they said and wrote are therefore not personal views and opinions, but the word of their Lord and Master. Thus the message of Christ crucified, which Paul, an apostle of Christ, proclaimed, is not a thing to be embraced or rejected at pleasure, not a thing to be criticised, not a thing doomed

in process of time to be supplanted by something else, but a thing to be believed as emanating from God Himself. May this message always resound in this new church, be heard and embraced by sympathetic hearers, who shall cherish it in the mellow soil of their hearts and bring forth fruit to eternal life! Amen.

C. GAENSSLE.

## Sermon Outline for Whitmonday.

ACTS 10, 42—48.

On the day of Pentecost the *apostles* of Jesus were "filled with the Holy Ghost," and it was publicly manifested by their utterance that the Spirit was in them, Acts 2, 4. This happened to them in accordance with the promise which the Lord had given *them*, John 15, 26, 27; Acts 1, 5, 8. But in his Pentecostal oration Peter showed that not only a promise of Jesus, but also a prophecy of Joel had been fulfilled by the strange events of that day, Acts 2, 16. Now, this prophecy has a very wide scope: it predicts the outpouring of the Spirit "*upon all flesh*," upon sons and daughters, young men and old men, servants and hand-maidens, vv. 17, 18. Moreover, this outpouring of which Joel had spoken had not been restricted to a particular day, *e. g.*, the seventh Sunday after the Passover in the year in which our Lord rose from the dead, but Joel had said: "in the last days," v. 17; "before that great and notable day of the Lord come," v. 20. And indeed, the general scope of the prophecy which we noted requires that the outpouring of the Spirit be a continuous event, not a single, isolated occurrence, and a universal boon of grace, not an exceptional privilege of particular persons. That Peter so understood the events of that day is manifest, furthermore, from the reply he made at the close of his oration to those who asked him, "What shall we do?" He told them how they should also "receive the gift of the Holy Ghost," v. 38, because, said he, "the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord, our God, shall call," v. 39. Subsequent events proved the truth of this statement: Acts 4, 31; 6, 5; 8, 15, 18; 9, 17. One such event is recorded in Acts 10, and this is remarkable before others, because it was a surprise to Peter himself. Although Peter had preached correct doctrine concerning the gift of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, his Jewish prejudice prevented him from grasping the full force of his own declaration, and when he was called to the house of the first Christian Gentile, Cornelius, he hesitated, and God had to show him by a significant vision that the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost embraced also a despised Roman centurion and his pagan household. Our text relates how Pentecost was celebrated in the home of a Gentile.



The wonderful things which happened on Pentecost excite our curiosity, all the more because we are told that we shall receive the Holy Ghost likewise. What does this mean? Shall we speak with other tongues and work miracles? If so, our Pentecost has not come. But let us not draw hasty conclusions, but endeavor patiently to answer from God's Word this question:

### HAVE WE RECEIVED THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST?

#### 1. *What is the gift of the Holy Ghost?*

The Holy Ghost fell on Peter's audience in Cornelius' house while Peter preached, v. 44. He had preached the remission of sins and life everlasting for Christ's sake, vv. 42, 43, just as he had done at Jerusalem, Acts 2, 38. When Peter related this occurrence later to his brethren at Jerusalem, he stated that God had given Cornelius and his house "the like gift" as he did unto the Christians at Jerusalem, Acts 11, 17, and the brethren acquiesced and said: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life," v. 18. Here is our answer: The gift of the Holy Ghost is repentance unto life, *i. e.*, true, saving faith in Christ who came to redeem, and who will come again to judge, the world, and who is, accordingly, our Lord. Such faith is not possible except by an operation of the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. 12, 3. (Luther's explanation of the Third Article.) It comes to us as a divine blessing; the Spirit "falls upon" our foolish reason and our impotent strength, and creates faith in our dead hearts.

Faith is the assurance of peace with God, Rom. 5, 1; Acts 10, 36, and causes rejoicing, Rom. 5, 2; Acts 10, 46. It is in its continuance and progress attended by a host of holy manifestations, all of which Scripture ascribes to the Spirit, Gal. 5, 22 ff. It is an active, busy, joyous force in man, which causes him to engage in works of love to God and his fellowman, Gal. 5, 6, and to accomplish wonderful things, 1 Cor. 13, 1, 2; Matt. 17, 20; John 14, 20. All these things, too, are the gift of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates man to a new and wonderful life, and fills that life with new and wonderful deeds.

#### 2. *How is the gift of the Holy Ghost received?*

Peter did not throw his audience into a trance, worked no magic spell, did not raise them into an ecstatic state of mind, or put them to sleep and caused them to dream dreams and behold visions, but he kept his hearers wide awake and attentive by preaching to them. And he declared that that was all that God had "commanded" him to do, v. 42.

He preached Christ the Judge and Christ the Redeemer, sin and grace, Law and Gospel, vv. 42, 43.

Afterwards he gave orders to have his believing hearers baptized, as a seal and confirmation of the gift which had been bestowed upon them, vv. 47, 48.

The gift of the Holy Ghost is received in no other way, Rom. 10, 17; Gal. 3, 2; nor is it retained in any other way, 1 Pet. 2, 2. Common Gospel preaching and the plain sacraments are the vehicles in which the gift of the Holy Spirit comes to us; and simple listening to the teaching of the Gospel, hearing with our ears, is all that God asks of those to whom the gift is brought. He Himself turns such hearing into believing. By faith, which He creates, He causes us to behold wonderful things in Scripture, and to see glorious visions, and dream happy dreams of paradise even here. God's Word also causes the believer to prophesy, to utter deep things that are out of all reach of human intelligence, and that amaze men. The simple Gospel proves in them who are not ashamed of it "the power of God," Rom. 1, 16. It accomplishes, unaided by human devices and without reinforcement of human strength, all that God desires His believing child to do.

*3. How does the individual become certain that he has received the gift of the Holy Ghost?*

Peter, and the company who had come up with him from Joppa, observed that his hearers were receiving, and acknowledged that they had received, the Holy Ghost, vv. 45. 47. Nobody needed to inform these converts to the faith of Christ that the gift was in their possession. The Spirit at once bore them witness of their adoption, Rom. 8, 16. 26, and moved their lips to praises of the grace which they had received, yea, equipped them in the same manner as the apostles had been equipped, v. 47, to speak in new tongues. Faith is its own evidence. The believer requires no outside proof that he is such. The prayer and praise to which his heart is stirred, his new thoughts, desires, volitions, purposes, the whole spiritual activity with which the new life in him teems, is evidence incontrovertible to him that he is a child of God and acts as a child of God should.

The manifestations of the Spirit have been different in different Christians and at different times in the history of the Church, 1 Cor. 12, 4 ff. God has regulated His gifts according to existing needs. Those gifts which everybody needs all the time, for his salvation, viz., repentance unto life, peace with God, love, joy, hope, God always bestows and desires that we should pray for them, Luke 11, 13. All other gifts, all extraordinary administrations, operations, and manifestations of the Spirit, He "divides to every man severally as He will," 1 Cor. 12, 11. If He wills that we should not have these peculiar gifts, we must not crave them and imagine that they are the only conclusive evidence that we have received the gift of the Holy Ghost. They are not: to be able to call Jesus our Lord is a greater gift than to speak with tongues; for a time will come when the latter shall fail, 1 Cor. 13, 8, but Jesus will be still confessed by us as our Lord when we are in heaven, Phil. 2, 11.